



Scottish election 2026

A guide for Quakers

This guide is for individuals, groups and meetings interested in knowing more about the upcoming Scottish election in May 2026. It gives an overview of some key issues for Quakers in Scotland, suggesting questions that Quakers may wish to ask their parliamentary candidates. It has advice about holding hustings and other ways to engage with the election.

Promoted by Adwoa Burnley on behalf of Quakers in Scotland

Quaker Meeting House, 7 Victoria Terrace, Edinburgh, EH1 2JL

www.quakerscotland.org | admin@quaker.scot

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The 2026 Scottish election

A key opportunity

This is a pivotal moment for Scottish politics as debates happen about the future of the economy in Scotland, the place of climate policy, the cost of living crisis and the direction of public services such as the NHS. Therefore, for Quakers, this is an opportunity to talk to people in our community about our values and the issues we care about. We have the chance to shape politics in Scotland as we raise our priorities with candidates.

“Remember your responsibility as citizens for the government of your town and country... Do not be content to accept things as they are, but keep an alert and questioning mind. Seek to discover the causes of social unrest, injustice and fear...Work for an order of society which will allow [people] to develop their capacities and will foster their desire to serve.”

Quaker faith & practice, 23.01

What is a Scottish election?

A Scottish election is when people in Scotland vote to choose their representatives in the Scottish Parliament. You have eight Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) representing you: one MSP is for your local area and the other seven are for the region of Scotland that you live in. All MSPs are elected for a five-year term.

You get two votes:

1. The first vote is for your **constituency MSP**. Candidates are listed by name. A constituency MSP represents one constituency and is elected using the first past the post system. This means that the candidate with the most votes wins.
2. The second vote is for your **regional MSPs**. Regional MSPs represent one of the eight regions. Each region elects seven regional MSPs, who are elected under the Additional Member System. When casting their regional vote, voters choose between political parties rather than named individuals (except where individuals are standing as independent candidates on the regional list).

You can find out more about what the Scottish Parliament has jurisdiction over here: www.parliament.scot/about/how-parliament-works/devolved-and-reserved-powers and see who the current MSPs are here: www.parliament.scot/msps.

How Quakers can take part in the Scottish election

Register and vote

Many of you will have already registered to vote, but if not, you need to do this by 20 April 2026 to have your say in the Scottish election. You can vote from the age of 16 in this election.

Remember to register at your new address if you have moved house. If you want to vote by post or by proxy (when someone else votes for you), you need to register for this type of vote.

Visit www.gov.uk/register-to-vote to find out more and register.

Ahead of the Scottish election, you'll be sent your polling card, which will tell you where and when to vote. Find out more at www.mygov.scot/voting-in-elections-in-scotland/how-to-vote.

Explore the issues and campaign on the causes you care about

Quakers in Scotland are focusing on four key issues in the run-up to the election, based on our values and the priorities we have set for our national work. We encourage you to campaign on these issues and bear them in mind when choosing who to vote for. We know that many Quakers across Scotland will want to champion other issues too and we support them in this.

On [pages 7-20](#) we outline the issues that Quakers have chosen to focus on during this election. We suggest topics for you to reflect on and discuss with friends, family, and people in your meeting. These might be useful for conversations between older and younger members of your meeting, or between existing members and people who are new to Quakerism. We also suggest questions you might want to ask candidates.

Engage with local candidates

By building a relationship with your local parliamentary candidates you can encourage them to champion the issues you care about and maintain their integrity if they are elected. You can do this as a meeting and as an individual. See [page 21](#) for more ideas about how to do this.

Be aware of the laws

There are some laws that national Quaker bodies and other charities should be aware of if they are promoting certain issues or viewpoints during the election. We have summarised them in a document called *2026 Elections: Guidance for Quaker communities* found in the document section here: quakerscotland.org/election.

Key issues

1. Truth and Integrity

Why it matters

Quakers share parliamentarians' concerns about increased polarisation and a lack of shared purpose and hopes within our society and within politics. Democracy has been weakened by a loss of trust and connection between the electorate and the elected. This can and should be addressed with urgency.

In the Scottish parliament there is a ceremonial mace which represents the desires of the Scottish public for our politicians. The mace is always present in the chamber during debates and it is inscribed with four words: integrity, compassion, justice and wisdom. These values should be guiding the work of MSPs, so you could use them as a focus of your interaction with candidates as you encourage greater truth and integrity in politics.

The values on the mace link closely to the Quaker values of peace, equality, truth, simplicity and sustainability. It is our responsibility to build kind, welcoming communities and elect people of integrity to represent us.

What we're calling for

1. Behaviour of politicians

We ask all MSPs to communicate honestly and respectfully during and after the election including:

- **Not engaging in attacks on others or scapegoating any group.**

- **Speaking truthfully about policies.** For example, we are concerned about a lack of truthfulness in how carbon capture and storage are discussed, particularly in relation to how much carbon such projects can realistically capture. We are also concerned about the lack of transparency around the energy use of data centres.

2. Improving Holyrood

The next Scottish government must:

- **Take steps to strengthen the processes and culture in Holyrood** to promote truth, integrity and equity. This includes improving training for MSPs and staff.

Topics for reflection and discussion among Quakers

- How can we promote the values of the Scottish parliament, as symbolically engraved on the parliamentary mace (integrity, compassion, justice, wisdom) in our interactions with candidates?
- How can we support our local parliamentary candidates to maintain their integrity during and after the Scottish election, especially if they become MSPs?

Question for candidates

- How will you uphold truth and integrity during the election and help improve standards in the Scottish parliament once you are elected?

2. Climate and economic justice

Why it matters

Quakers are committed to equality and sustainability. We want to see a world in which all living beings can thrive. For many years, Quakers have argued that climate action must place equality and justice at its core.

“We have seen signs of hope, but we have work to do, to transform ourselves, our communities and our world.”

Minute 33, Britain Yearly Meeting 2019

The climate crisis is a grave situation affecting us all, but it does not affect us all equally. Most wealthy people and countries have so far escaped the worst impacts of climate breakdown, while the poorest, who have done the least to cause the crisis, are hardest hit.

By taking action on the climate crisis in Scotland, we can address the cost of living crisis in Scotland. Our actions here to reduce emissions also help millions of people around the world.

What we're calling for

1. Loss and damage finance

At recent UN climate talks, countries including the UK agreed to set up a Loss and Damage Fund to help people in the worst affected places rebuild. While the UK government holds primary responsibility for contributing to this fund, Scotland also has an important role with loss and damage finance.

Scotland was the first wealthy nation to provide loss and damage finance. That is something that we should be proud of but now is an achievement to build on. We want to see:

- **An increase in Scottish government funding for the Climate Justice Fund to £15 million in the next parliament** to enable people in the poorest parts of the world to rebuild after climate-related loss and damage – this will help to reduce poverty, conflict and forced migration.
- **Continued and expanded contributions through the Humanitarian Emergency Fund**, building on recent increases in the 2026 Scottish budget.
- **All loss and damage finance needs to be new, additional funding, delivered as grants, not loans.**

More detail and case studies are available in the Joint Loss and Damage Briefing (October 2025) which we wrote with Christian Aid, SCIAF and Global Justice Now. It can be found in the document section of www.quakerscotland.org/our-work/parliamentary-engagement. Progress has been made on loss and damage since October 2025, but further action is urgently needed.

2. Phasing out fossil fuels

The UK is still far too wedded to fossil fuels, which, as well as exacerbating the breakdown of our climate, harms our security and cost of living. Decisions about licences are reserved for the UK government, but Scotland can send a strong message by:

- **Not supporting any new oil and gas developments.**

- **Signing the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty** (fossilfuel treaty.org), as many other nations have already done.

3. Commitment to and investment in a just transition

Justice must be at the heart of our transition away from fossil fuels. We need support for the communities and individuals who are most affected by the necessary changes, and those least able to adapt. And it must be just globally as well as locally, recognising the debt owed by those who are more responsible for the many crises we face.

Measures to tackle climate change can simultaneously reduce emissions, adapt to a changing climate and bring resilience and wellbeing to families, communities, workers and the places and nature which we love. Climate, health and social justice are inextricably linked. For example, improving insulation in homes benefits the health of individuals as well as benefiting communities and the planet.

We are calling on the next Scottish government to:

- **Redirect funding towards fair, sustainable climate solutions** including:
 - Energy-efficient homes and buildings,
 - Decentralised renewable energy,
 - Accessible public transport,
 - Local food production and sustainable agriculture,
 - Sustainable forestry, waste, and water management.

- **Implement the Climate Change Plan**, expected to become law before the election.
- **Introduce robust criteria assessing the full carbon impact** of any publicly funded project.
- **Focus on proven ways to cut emissions**, particularly transport and heating, rather than relying on speculative technologies such as carbon capture and storage.
- **Launch a comprehensive public awareness campaign** to help people understand the benefits of climate action for prosperity, health and community wellbeing.

Scotland is currently off track for its 2045 net-zero pathway. The incoming government must act decisively and without delay.

Topics for reflection and discussion among Quakers

- What role has Scotland played in causing the climate crisis and what does that mean for its responsibilities now?
- How is climate change affecting our lives and those of people around the world? What do we have in common and how can we show solidarity with each other?
- How can we engage with local and national decisionmakers to help build understanding and agreement on tackling the climate and cost-of-living crises at the same time?

Questions for candidates

- How will you seek to inspire the public about the benefits of climate action?

- How will you seek to ensure that there is decisive action to implement the Climate Change Plan and move Scotland towards net zero by 2045?

For more questions see the election resource produced by Stop Climate Chaos Scotland, of which Quakers in Scotland is a member: www.stopclimatechaos.scot/campaign/holyrood-elections-2026

3. Peace

Why it matters

Quakers believe that all life is precious. We have opposed war and promoted peace since the earliest days of our faith in the 1600s. Today, peace remains a crucial issue in Scotland because:

- Public money supports companies in Scotland to make arms components going to conflicts in Europe, the Middle East and elsewhere.
- Military and arms companies are given access to our schools. By contrast, peace education, if embedded in our schools, would cultivate values of mutual respect and reconciliation at all levels from the personal to the international.

We accept that, unfortunately, violence seems deeply rooted in our world. But we believe that responding with further violence and fuelling the military and the arms trade only makes us more insecure. Genuine human security comes from investing in all the things that make us feel secure, such as healthcare, a fair economy, the environment, peacebuilding and diplomacy.

We believe people need to be taught how to transform conflict and build peace from a young age. Peace education is helping children and young people across the country to build positive relationships at different levels, from personal to societal to global, but it needs more funding and support.

What we're calling for

1. Redirection of military spending

We want to see:

- **More robust checks on Scottish government grants**, including through Scottish Enterprise, to ensure that public money is not funding investment or production that is implicated in human rights abuses or violations of international law.
- **A shift in public spending away from weapons and the military** to be redirected to address the causes of conflict such as gross inequality and climate breakdown.

2. Support and fund peace education

We call on the next Scottish government to:

- **Help create a culture of peace and nonviolence** through the education system, in line with Scotland's stated commitment to good global citizenship and Sustainable Development Goal 4.7.
- **Incorporate peace education into the curriculum** as a cornerstone of learning and sustainability.
- **Explicitly recognise a duty to educate for peace**, and provide funding for peace education, training and research.
- **Allocate increased funding to the Scottish Development Education centres** to equip and enable our schools to be leaders in Global Citizenship Education.

More information can be found:

- In the Quakers in Britain report, Peace at the Heart www.quaker.org.uk/documents/peace-at-the-heart.
- From the Scotland International Development Alliance of which Quakers in Scotland are members www.intdevalliance.scot/our-work/influencing-policy/2021-2026-policy-priorities-for-scotland.

3. Protect rights and work for peace

We want the Scottish government to:

- **Introduce the Scottish Human Rights Bill** which was promised and then paused. It covers the right to a healthy environment, protection from discrimination for many groups and protection of economic, social and cultural rights.
- **Use advocacy opportunities** to call for an end to devastating conflicts and nuclear weapons (e.g., Trident). Also, to highlight the security needs of all people and ensure accountability for violations of international law.

Topics for reflection and discussion among Quakers

- What makes us feel safe and at peace?
- How can schools help to build peace?
- What can the next Scottish government do to make Scotland more peaceful?
- How can Scotland help to reduce conflict around the world?

Questions for candidates

- How will you help provide genuine peace and security by tackling the root causes of violence and conflict?
- How will you ensure that Scotland honours the sustainable development goals by promoting a culture of peace and nonviolence in Scottish schools?

4. Compassionate Justice and the Prisons Crisis

Why it matters

Scotland is at an important turning point in criminal justice policy. At present, our system relies heavily on costly prison expansion and punitive measures. This approach is not only financially unsustainable but also socially damaging, as it fails to improve public safety or support people to change their lives. There are well-evidenced alternatives that can reduce the financial pressures of maintaining the current prison estate and cut reoffending rates, helping to break the cycle of harm experienced by individuals and communities.

What we're calling for

1. Redirect resources away from large scale prisons and use secure housing only for the dangerous few

The Scottish government should:

- **Critically review the costly construction of new large-scale prisons** (such as HMP Glasgow at £1 billion), redirecting resources toward community-based justice initiatives that demonstrate better outcomes at lower costs.
- **Create small therapeutic communities within the prison system** modelled on the Barlinnie Special Unit approach. These should be reintroduced as a more effective and humane alternative to solitary confinement for managing violent or disruptive prisoners.

- **Advocate for the reduced the use of imprisonment** for those not assessed as posing a risk to society, for example using alternatives such as electronic monitoring and restorative justice.

2. Positive work in communities

Positive work in the community is essential to transform society. We would like to see:

- **A reinforced infrastructure** of revitalised Community Justice Scotland and Criminal Justice Social Work services which should focus on real change and restorative justice.
- **An increase to the annual budget for community alternatives to prison** substantially beyond the current £148 million allocation, recognising that community supervision can reduce reconviction rates significantly (from approximately 52% to 29% for short custodial sentences).

3. Citizens' Assemblies focused on criminal justice reform

There should be:

- **Citizens' Assemblies** focused on criminal justice reform. This would foster informed public dialogue on alternatives to imprisonment and the public health approach to violence reduction, particularly regarding violence against women and girls.

Topics for reflection and discussion among Quakers

- How would you like to be treated if you ended up in the justice system?

- What do you think about restorative justice?
- How can conditions be improved for people in prison and prison staff?

Questions for candidates

- What will you do to reduce re-offending rates in Scotland?
- What changes would you make to the justice system?
How would you improve conditions in prisons?

Engaging with parliamentary candidates

Being a F/friend to your candidates

By engaging with your local candidates, you can support them to maintain their integrity and become champions of the issues you care about. Being a parliamentary candidate can be incredibly hard – they usually experience abuse, a heavy workload, and high personal costs. If you acknowledge their humanity and offer them support, as well as trying to influence them, you can build a meaningful and long-lasting relationship that will benefit everyone involved.

As a meeting, you can send a letter, email or greetings card to your parliamentary candidates. You may wish to organise a session for Friends at your meeting to write the letters/emails at the same time – like an Amnesty group. You can also email your local candidates as an individual.

You can see our advice for engaging with an MSP/candidate and a template letter in the document section of quakerscotland.org/election. You can find out which candidates are standing in your constituency on the Scottish political party websites. Contact details may be found online or you can contact the relevant party for them.

If a candidate responds positively, you may wish to suggest a meeting to discuss how you can work with them and how they can advance an issue that you care about. You could invite them to a meeting for worship and/or a chat over tea and coffee at your local meeting house. When you meet them, make sure you ask them questions about their views and emphasise your desire to stay in touch with them and uphold their work for

positive change. Christian Aid has written a helpful guide called *Breaking Bread* for engaging with candidates/politicians in a relaxed way, which you can find at caid.org.uk/breakingbread.

Impartiality

Regulations are strict about impartiality during the pre-election period. As a Quaker meeting, you must be balanced in your engagement and not show party political bias by giving support to certain candidates or parties over others. This does not mean that you have to meet all candidates but you must have an impartial reason for your selection. You can find out more in our guide to election laws found in the document section here: quakerscotland.org/election.

Organising a hustings

During the period before an election, some Quaker meetings organise election meetings (sometimes known as hustings), where members of the public can listen to and ask questions of the candidates in their constituency. This can support the democratic process and facilitate public debate. The opportunity for respectful discussion in a neutral space is often appreciated by candidates as well as voters. There are lots of factors to think about when considering holding a hustings. The Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office, of which Quakers in Scotland are a member, has produced a hustings guide, which can be found in the document section here: quakerscotland.org/election.

You may also wish to encourage Friends to attend hustings and report back to their local or area meeting about what the different candidates are saying about key Quaker issues.

Looking after yourself and others

The election period can be a difficult time for those of us who are passionate about how our nation is run. The desire to stay informed, build relationships with candidates and discuss issues with people in our communities can mean we become very busy. Make sure you plan ways to rest, connect with others and celebrate steps forward.

It can also be difficult to see divisive and emotive issues being discussed on the news and within our communities. Consider how you can remain in friendship with those in your community you may disagree with, and whether the conversations you're in feel collaborative and positive.

"Remember your responsibilities as a citizen for the conduct of local, national, and international affairs. Do not shrink from the time and effort your involvement may demand."

Advices and Queries 34

This guide forms part of the Scottish election resources produced by Quakers in Scotland for the 2026 Scottish election. Visit the document section of quakerscotland.org/election to see all the materials available.

For advice and support on Scottish public affairs and advocacy or to receive the bi-weekly email on Scottish parliamentary engagement opportunities and events in Scotland, please contact:

scottishpolitics@quaker.org.uk

www.quakerscotland.org/election

Published by Quakers in Britain

Friends House, 173 Euston Road, London, NW1 2BJ

T: 020 7663 1000 | E: enquiries@quaker.org.uk

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www.quaker.org.uk

